

Influenza (Flu)

1. What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza, also called flu, is an illness caused by a virus (germ). Many people in the United States (U.S.) get the flu each year. The flu is very common, but can cause serious illness for certain people. Every year, between 5-10% of the U.S. population get the flu, and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from complications of this disease.

2. How does the flu spread?

Flu usually spreads from person-to-person through droplets from a sick person's cough or sneeze. It also can spread by touching a surface or an object that has flu virus on it, like a doorknob or computer keyboard, and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Flu viruses are found worldwide. The flu occurs mostly in the fall and winter months in the United States, but can also spread into spring.

3. What are the symptoms of the flu?

There are many illnesses that feel like the flu. The symptoms of the flu usually come on suddenly and strong, and can include headache, fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, feeling weak or tired, and muscle or body aches. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults. People can have the flu and spread it to others 1-2 days before showing signs of illness.

4. Who is at greater risk for severe illness from the flu?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people). Serious problems related to the flu can happen at any age. Some people are at high risk for developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease)
- People with weakened immunity (such as cancer, HIV or AIDS)
- Children

5. How is the flu treated?

Prescription medicines called antiviral drugs can treat the flu. If you are sick, these drugs can make you feel better faster and make the flu feel milder. Most people who get the flu will get better without these medicines. If you need help getting well, your doctor may decide to give you antiviral drugs. People who are more at risk for severe illness should see their doctor right away if they think they have the flu.

6. If I have the flu, should I take antibiotics?

Antibiotics do not work to treat the flu because the flu is caused by a virus. Doctors use antibiotics for treating infections caused by bacteria.



Key Points:

- The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year.
- Many of the people who get very sick are older than 65 years, have a medical condition, or are younger than 5 years of age.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve. Stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading it to others.

For more information:

Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>

California Department of
Public Health
www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions

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7. What can I do to protect myself from getting the flu?

The best way to prevent getting flu is to get vaccinated every year. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated. Since flu viruses can change every year, the vaccine is updated annually to protect against the most common viruses. You should get a flu shot every year. You can stay healthy through the year by practicing these healthy habits:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay away from sick people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use medication the way your doctor recommends it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your arm when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.

8. Where can I get vaccinated?

If you don't have health insurance or a doctor that offers flu vaccines, dial 2-1-1 or visit <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/influenza.htm> for a list of low-cost immunization clinics. Vaccination locations can also be found through the Flu Vaccine Finder at www.flu.gov.

9. When should I seek emergency medical care?

The flu can be very serious for some people. If you or someone you know gets sick and shows any of the following warning signs, get emergency medical care as soon as possible.

Who	Seek medical help if...
Infants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast breathing or trouble breathing • Bluish skin color • Not drinking enough fluids or no tears when crying • Serious or constant vomiting • Not waking up or not interacting in their usual way • Fussier than usual (including not wanting to be held) • Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough • Having far fewer wet diapers than normal
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast breathing or trouble breathing • Bluish skin color • Not drinking enough fluids or no tears when crying • Serious or constant vomiting • Not waking up or not interacting in their usual way • Unable to eat • Very sore muscles
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard time breathing or shortness of breath • Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach • Sudden dizziness, confusion, or behavior change • Serious or constant vomiting • Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough